



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE STAFF REPORT

Site: 5 Palmer Avenue
Case: HPC 2019.045
Applicant Name: City of Somerville
Date of Application: July 11, 2019
Recommendation: Not Significant
Hearing Date: July 16, 2019

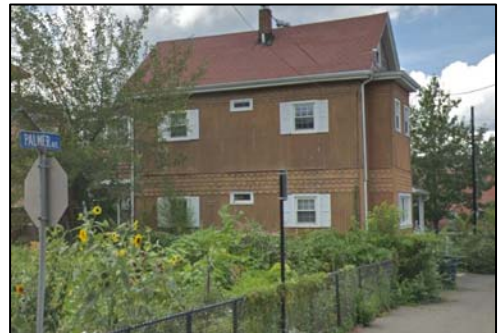
I. Historical Association

Historical Context: East Somerville is one of the oldest areas in the City of Somerville. Franklin Street was designated as a “rangeway” for livestock as early as 1658, although it was not traveled as a public road until a later date.

East Somerville was sparsely developed until the 1840s when railroad transportation became available. At first, the area was developed for businessmen who commuted to Boston to work.

Later, as Somerville became more industrial, the new industries attracted many laborers to East Somerville. Speculators built housing developments with modest houses on narrow lots. The greatest period of development in East Somerville took place from 1875-1885. Around this time, clay pits on Glen Street, which had been part of the Tufts family’s brickmaking business, were filled in. The filled-in area became one of Somerville’s first playgrounds, now known as Glen Park.

Evolution of Site: The house first appears on the 1884 Hopkins Map and attributed to the ownership of M. Cummings. By 1900, her daughter Nora Cullen is shown to have ownership of the parcel. Two mentions of 5 Palmer Street were found in the Boston Globe. The earliest article was an 1928



Top image: close-up of left elevation

Bottom image: 5 Palmer Ave, abutting school and grounds and abutting community garden

obituary for Mildred A. Forrest. The other article mentioned that Vincent Marino of 5 Palmer Ave had posted bail for a sex offender, Michael Mongitordi in 1931. Due to time constraints deed and directory research was not done.

In 1999 the adjoining properties were taken by the City for the construction of the Edgerly Early Education Center which has since been renamed. 5 Palmer Avenue is the last remaining house on this private way. To the right of the property are the playing fields for the Capuano Early Childhood Center. To the left of the property are community gardening plots.

Architectural Description: The house is a 2 ½-story, gable-fronted residential structure that is roughly in the Italianate style. There is a flat-roofed, two-story bay to the left of the front door on the front façade of the building. There are no original windows or doors extant on the exterior of the building and the structure has been resided with T-111 siding. A brick foundation remains above grade.

Summary: Constructed between 1874 and 1884, the 2 ½ story wood-framed house is the lone remnant of neighborhood of workers housing. The other houses were taken and demolished as part of the development of the Early Childhood Center and Glen Park.

Findings on Historical Association

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (a) **importantly associated with people, events or history** or (b) historically or architecturally significant (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B). Findings for (b) are at the end of the next section.*

(a) In accordance with the historic information obtained from *Findings on Historical Association*, which utilizes historic maps/atlasses, City reports and directories, and building permit research, and through an examination of resources that document the history of the City, such as *Somerville Past and Present*, Staff **do not** find 5 Palmer Avenue to be importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth.

The subject building is not found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to lack of information regarding any important people residing at the property in the Boston Globe or elsewhere although more research could be done.

II. Historical and Architectural Significance

The findings for historical and/or architectural significance of a historic property address the period, style, method of building construction and association with a reputed architect or builder of the subject property, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B).

The period of significance for 5 Palmer Avenue begins as workers housing circa 1884.

Integrity

The National Park Service identifies historic integrity as the ability of a property to convey significance. A property should possess sufficient integrity to convey, represent or contain the values and qualities for which it is judged significant; therefore, the following is an identification

and evaluation of these qualities and alterations as they affect the ability of the subject property to convey significance.

- a. Location: The building has not been moved. It is located between a community garden and a playing field, next to a school and a parking lot.
- b. Design: The design is a gable end house in form with
- c. Materials: The building has mix of wood shingles and siding, and replacement windows.
- d. Alterations: a rear porch has been added and enclosed. The siding is a mixture of Victorian era inspiration mixed with late 20th century vertical wood plank siding. The sizes of the window openings have all been altered. See photos.

Evaluation of Integrity: The building retains its form and function but not its original design. The building has little architectural integrity having undergone numerous alterations.

The building is not architecturally distinguished. It retains the essential Italianate form but not much more. It has been altered and is totally out of context

Findings for Historical and Architectural Significance

*For a Determination of Significance, the subject building must be found either (a) importantly associated with people, events or history or (b) **historically or architecturally significant** (Ordinance 2003-05, Section 2.17.B). Findings for (a) can be found at the end of the previous section.*

(b) In accordance with the *Finding on Historical and Architectural Significance*, which addresses period, style, method of building construction, and association with a reputed architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, as well as integrity, which assess the ability of the property to convey significance, Staff do not find 5 Palmer Avenue historically or architecturally significant.

The subject building is not found historically and architecturally significant due to lack of architectural distinction, extensive alterations and lack of context.

III. Recommendation

Recommendations are based upon an analysis by Historic Preservation Staff of the permit application and the required findings for the Demolition Review Ordinance, which requires archival and historical research, and an assessment of historical and architectural significance, conducted prior to the public meeting for a Determination of Significance. This report may be revised or updated with a new recommendation and/or findings based upon additional information provided to Staff or through further research.

For a Determination of Significance, the structure must be either (A) listed on the National Register or (B) at least 50 years old.

(A) The structure is NOT listed on or within an area listed on the National Register of Historic Places, nor is the structure the subject of a pending application for listing on the National Register.

OR

(B) The structure, circa 1951, is at least 50 years old.

AND

For a Determination of Significance under (B), the subject building must be found either (a) importantly associated with people, events or history or (b) historically or architecturally significant.

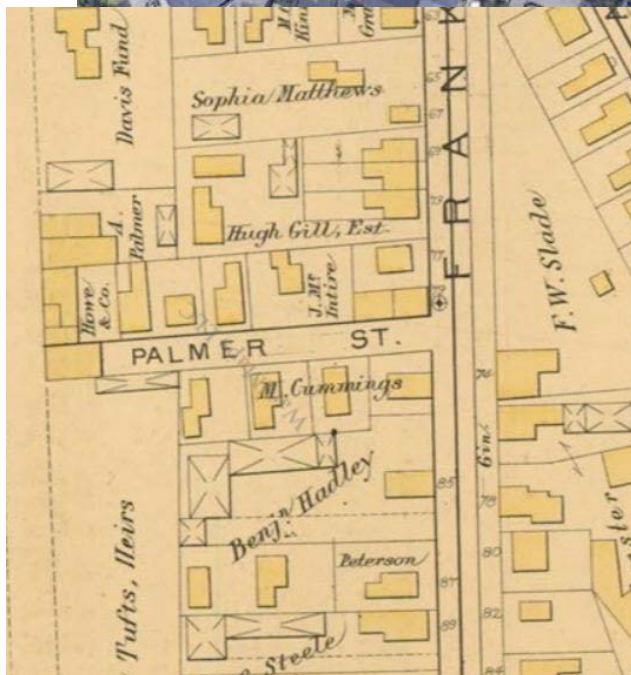
- (a) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical Association*, which utilizes historic maps/atlas, City reports and directories, and building permit research, and through an examination of resources that document the history of the City, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission not find 5 Palmer Avenue importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth.**

The subject building is not found importantly associated with the broad architectural, cultural, economic and social history of the City due to lack of information regarding any important people residing at the property in the Boston Globe or elsewhere although more research could be done.

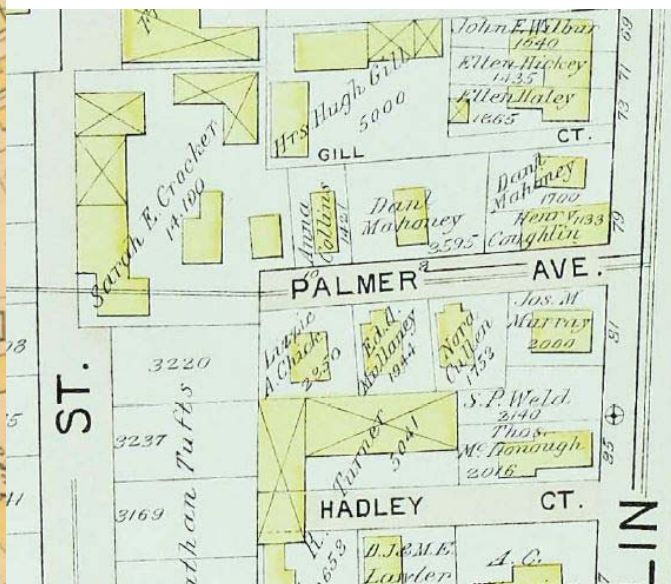
OR

- (b) In accordance with the *Findings on Historical and Architectural Significance*, which addresses period, style, method of building construction, and association with a reputed architect or builder, either by itself or in the context of a group of buildings or structures, as well as integrity, the ability to convey significance, **Staff recommend that the Historic Preservation Commission do not find 5 Palmer Avenue historically and architecturally significant.**

The subject building is not found historically and architecturally significant due to lack of architectural distinction, extensive alterations and lack of context.



1884 Hopkins Plate 1



1895 Bromley Plate 9



